1: Messing E-5 (1953-1954)1957 MP5 Amhara MP5

Note on Methodology

121 The methods of ethnography, which constitute the basic method
123 used in gathering the data for this report, had to be followed with considerable discretion, while in Ethiopia. Care had to be taken to avoid misunderstandings and loss of confidence among the inhabitants who view study by outsiders with misgivings.

122 Careful preparation by the author included brief but intensive study of the Amharic language, including writing and grammar; letters of introduction from a scholar who has the confidence of the emperor; lengthy procedures in governmental offices in Addis Ababa to obtain permission and passes to travel to the hinterland where the old culture is little changed by modern contacts.

121 In planning the field project under such circumstances, the author deemed it advisable to formulate his objectives in general rather than specific terms; to assume a flexible and patient attitude; to do what was possible; to establish a base-line of ethnographic information and initial analysis.

122 Procedures in the field included travel by mule to various rural hamlets. This was necessary due to regional differences in culture traits, notably in the ethnic division of labor. Travel is possible only in the dry season, October to mid-June. A guide-interpreter was
123 secured in the town of Gondar, where English is taught in the new
9:4 elementary school. His services became increasingly valuable in interviewing, checking observations and information for reliability and validity; and, by no means least, in establishing rapport with people in the region, most of whom knew his father well. For the guide's father was the local "woggāsha" (native surgeon-herbologist-empiricist).

Finally, the author checked his own results against the work of

640

794 782 796 The poet now lures the "pagan" zar Gamyu, whose home is in a bamboo forest in the Metemma lowland of the eastern escarpment of Ethiopia.

Poet: "Tall bamboo you (lit. he) will eat; bamboo you will devour;
Lord, named "Dämmäna" (lit. cloud), from where you devour bamboo;
Gamyu, Gamyu, Gamyu, pure honey (flattering synonym for healer) I
dance eyaho, eyaho dance, Oh Gamyu!"

Thereupon one of the women devotees who has shaved a tonsure in the center of her skull ("Gamyu" comes from "gamye", meaning tonsure), which is the visible requirement he makes of those whom he "possesses", begins to rise. The "gurri" she dances differs only in details from the one performed for the Galla zar spirits.

It is now 11:00 P.M. The various male zars expected on the program for the evening have now "descended". It is time for the female zars to begin making their descent, which is safe, now that many protective male zars are about.

794 796 781 Word is whispered around that a male and a female zar who "will bite" are about to attack some of the possessed. Everyone rises and crowds close to the wall, leaving the hearth and the center of the room free. Only Lady Sälämtew seems unafraid. She calls out a warning to the [124] foreigner, in her husky voice but in friendly tone, advising him to stand on the bench so as not to be bitten. "Ayzäw" (be well, be of good courage, be of good cheer) she calls out to the foreigner, using the [195] polite address, and forgetting to use the familiar 2nd person singular feminine, which is her privilege.

This time the possession begins differently. Two women detach themselves from the frightened crowd almost simultaneously. Both

159 754 not find him. They vowed to waylay him some night and beat him bloody, but bystanders felt that they would cool their tempers and perhaps try to get the merchant into trouble with the local police by planting stolen goods on him - a common procedure, in the towns.

Later the same day, the Arab merchant was conducting business as usual. The rumor did not seem to have hurt him, but local grapevine had it that husbands would restrain their wives from shopping there, though they would risk sending servants. Abdulla had nothing devilish about him, except the distinguishing mark of the capped incisors. He was medium-sized, slender, calm, without any stare that might have frightened the woman. His goods were the usual town goods, ranging from imported eyeglasses to notebooks for school children, and cheap beads.

By this time the woman patient was seated on the dirt floor of her house, looking tired, worn out and dejected. She had no longer a headache, of which she had complained, but claimed to have "heartache" and swelling of the left breast. A neighboring woman was brewing coffee. Her husband's brother, who was also present, [124] asked my advice. I gave him some aspirin for her. She forgot her apathy for a moment and gratefully and politely nodded. Later she refused to take that strange medicine of the foreigner.

d. Ethnic Caste under Suspicion of Sorcery

754 563 The Falasha ethno-religious group has been described in connection with the division of labor, for they are the ironsmiths and potters in the Amhara regions, especially in the province of Begemdir (Gondar).